

WAR DEPARTMENT  
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PHILIPPINE RESCUE MISSION

Just at dusk and as the moon rose on a cloudy night on Luzon in the Philippines, a picked band of 121 Sixth Army Rangers with some 280 Filipino guerrillas struck at the Jap Prisoner-of-War stockade at Cabanatuan and in just 28 minutes carried out one of the most perfectly executed and personally satisfying missions of their career in the Pacific. They rescued 511 American and British prisoners of war in a daring thrust 25 miles behind Jap lines in order to save them from possible death and torture by the Japs as the American Army approached Manila.

Twelve veterans of this raid, with 27 months of Pacific fighting all the way from Buna Mission in New Guinea, behind them, have returned to this country to tell war workers of their experiences and how desperately important it is that the Armed Forces get all the supplies and equipment they need to push the Japs back and force them to unconditional surrender on their homeland islands.

Captain Robert W. Prince, 25, of Seattle, Washington, wearer of the Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart, was second in command on the Cabanatuan Raid. In his opinion "the Japs won't ever give up -- not until they're dead -- and it will take a lot more fighting and a lot more time to kill them all. They won't surrender and they hide out and burrow in inaccessible places, in caves, under tree roots, and strongly-built pillboxes from which they have to be dug out. The individual Jap soldier is good, well trained and not afraid to die. He is not as good a marksman as the American, except at a very close range. He also does not have nearly as good equipment. He is still using .25 and .30 caliber rifles."

This is the story of the mission by Captain Prince and each of the men in charge of the various phases of the operation:

"We received word on January 27th, of our mission to go into Jap-held territory and rescue prisoners of war held by the Japs in the Cabanatuan stockade. On January 28th, our group which included 121 American Rangers and Alamo Scouts, and almost 300 Filipino guerrillas left camp and drove in trucks 60 miles to guerrilla headquarters where we contacted Major Robert Lapham, an American who was acting as the head of a large band of Filipino guerrillas. The two guerrilla platoons were headed by Captain Pajota and Lieutenant Tombo, who was particularly outstanding in his assistance.

"Later on that Sunday night we marched in the dark across the Jap lines, led by the Filipinos. About 11 p. m. they sent back word to scatter and we hid, half on one side of the road and half on the other, while three Jap trucks and two tanks went by. Then we continued 25 miles on to Balancari village. Here, the Filipinos by their grapevine communication system had heard that we were coming and had prepared a big feast for us. Filipino girls, dressed in their best, sang the American National Anthem, God Bless America and God Bless the Philippines. All along the way, the Filipinos gave us fresh eggs, fried chicken and presents. We also collected carabao carts (carabao are Philippine water buffalo which they use for work animals) from the natives in every village we passed through in which to carry the 50 prisoners we estimated would be unable to walk. We found 225 that had to be carried. I would like to say right here that the Filipinos are wonderful people -- they fed us, fought with us and died for us.

"We had planned to attack that night but guerrilla scouts reported that large numbers of Japs had stopped over at the Cabanatuan stockade on their way North in their evacuation of Manila and Southern Luzon. Their number was so large that our force sent to liberate the prisoners could not take care of them so the action was postponed 24 hours. We moved four miles closer and stayed over Monday night at Platero.

"The Alamo Scouts, especially trained men for jungle reconnaissance patrol work, and attached to all Sixth Army units, moved up to within 75 to 100 yards of the stockade so they could easily see where the Jap guard posts, pillboxes, various



buildings and most important, where the American prisoners were kept in relation to the gates. We had air coverage all the time in the Philippines and could take excellent aerial photographs but didn't bomb the prisons for fear of hurting Americans held there."

Staff Sgt. Charles W. Brown, 29, of Chicago, Illinois, and Pfc. Gilbert Cox, 22, of Enterprise, Oregon, two of the Alamo Scouts on the raid and in the returned group, said that every time the American planes came over the Japs would run and dive into their foxholes.

"On Tuesday at 3 p. m.," Captain Prince continued, "the Scouts sent back all their information which was placed on an aerial map which our planes had previously taken of the camp. This proved extremely valuable to the success of the mission, for we knew just exactly where every Jap was approximately placed when we attacked. Three days later American troops took the camp and I had a chance to look it over in daylight. It looked much bigger and I believe if I had seen it before we attacked, I wouldn't have had as much nerve as I did the night of the raid.

"We made our plan of attack and all the men were briefed on how to attack what to do with the prisoners and how to get back to the American lines should they become separated. The carabao carts were hauled into position about a mile from Cabanatuan at 5 p. m. At six we contacted the Scouts about a half a mile from the stockade. Then, we started crawling on our stomachs through the rice paddies which fronted the camp and which provided us with cover about a foot high."

Sergeant Brown was in charge of the platoon whose objective was the garrison behind the prisoners' enclosure. Just at dusk he and his men moved up along side of the camp keeping under cover of a drainage ditch. A Jap sentry saw the last two men and yelled, "Stop" in English but they kept right on going and reached the rear guard house.

"A Jap walked through the door of the shack and immediately dropped with a hundreds in him," related Sergeant Brown, "Captain Prince then fired the red signal flare which was the signal to all the men to begin firing on their objectives. Our men used Browning Automatic Rifles, M-1 Rifles, "Tommy" guns, one Bazooka and hand and rifle grenades. The stockade was made of double barbed wire, so it was pretty easy to spot our objectives. The Japs fired a few mortar shells but they fell harmlessly beyond us."

Another group, which included Pfc. Carlton Dietzel, had the mission of knocking out the Jap pillbox which reconnaissance had located in front of the camp to the right. It was, according to the Scouts, directly in line with the west wall of the camp and under a bushy tree.

"About 15 seconds before we saw the red flare shot by Captain Prince," Private Dietzel said in describing this action, "we heard a Jap gong go off and we were afraid it was an alarm but after several minutes of suspense we decided it must be a regular time signal. Our team approached the pillbox with one B.A.R., our M-1 Rifles, and anti-tank grenades. We hurled in four of the grenades and later found the three had made a direct hit, killing the 3 Japs inside and tearing down most of the coconut logs that fortified the box. It was pretty cloudy and we couldn't see the box itself, and fired for the tree. We did see several bursts of fire from it but none of us was hit."

Staff Sgt. Theodore R. Richardson, 25, Dallas, Texas, led the platoon detailed to assault the gates of the prison. He shot off the padlock with his pistol only to have it shot out of his hand by a Jap bullet as it grazed the side of it. He picked it up, and with a "Tommy" gun in his other hand, he and his men rushed through the gates and down the center of the camp.

"A Jap walked out of one of the buildings," recalled Sergeant Richardson, "and asked in perfectly good English, 'What's going on here?' He dropped to the ground full of lead and we raced on through the center of the camp with the bazooka team that had been brought along to take care of a motor shed in the rear of the camp which reconnaissance scouts had noted and thought might hold Jap tanks. Happily, instead, it held three truckloads of Japs, packed in tight, ready to start at dusk on their evacuation north from Manila. The Japs never took a chance traveling



in the daylight when American planes could see and strafe them. They always waited for dark to travel but this time they waited too long, for the bazooka shells cut their trip short and destroyed all three trucks and the Japs in them."

Staff Sgt. William R. Butler, 29, of Cleveland, Oklahoma led the assault section of ten men who were to take care of the rear of the American prisoners' enclosure. The other assault groups had so well taken care of the Japs, however, that they had nothing to do, so they started helping and carrying the prisoners out. They found three whole buildings, flimsy structures with only thatched roofs, full of nothing but litter patients who had to be carried.

"The prisoners who could walk wanted to carry our rifles," Sergeant Butler said, "because they wanted to get a crack if possible at the Japs who had held them prisoner there for 38 months. They carried our rifles for 7 or 8 miles before giving them up. They all wanted to talk and we had a time making them realize we had to move fast and were still 25 miles from the safety of the American lines."

As Sergeant Butler put it, "they were a pretty happy bunch, they just couldn't realize we were Americans. A few English sailors who had been torpedoed off the Philippines told me, 'By Gad, the Yanks got us in here and they're getting us out.' We had saved and carried with us as much K-ration as we could for the prisoners and they thought it was wonderful," here Sergeant Butler shook his head uncomprehendingly.

Captain Prince then took up the narrative again and described the prisoners. "They were so excited that one who hadn't been out of bed for two years walked out with the others to a cart half a mile away. Another who had had his knee hurt so bad it had become terribly enlarged and he hadn't stood on it for six months, walked all the 7 miles to where we had a few ambulance.

"As soon as I had made sure all the prisoners were out I fired a red flare as a signal to start the trip back. Most of the prisoners had been in bed when the action started as there were no lights in the camp, and few had shoes and all had little clothing. We took off our socks and gave them to the men to make walking easier for them. It was hard to make the prisoners realize that they weren't safe yet but had 25 miles still to go. We were all pretty nervous and jumpy because we didn't think we'd be able to get out with no more trouble than we'd had so far.

"The prisoners had manufactured a radio in a water canteen with which they could pick up San Francisco and they were able to inform us that the Russians were now some 30 miles from Berlin instead of the 90 miles they had been three days before when we left our lines. Colonel Duckworth, who had served as official head of the Prisoner-of-War camp was a little skeptical of our uniforms at first because we hadn't worn our helmets and had on green herringbone fatigues instead of the old style blues that were regulation before the war. We used these fatigue jackets with rifles through the sleeves to make litters for the prisoners who could not walk and others who became too weak and exhausted on the trip back, as we didn't have enough carabao carts.

"While all our objectives were being carried out, the Filipino guerrillas had set up road blocks at either end of the main highway running in front of the stockade. At a Philippine settlement called Cabu, a few miles down the road from the stockade, the Japs had a garrison of 800 men. They started for the camp when they heard the shooting but the Filipino guerrillas took care of them and none were able to reach the camp. These guerrillas waited for an hour after the Americans started on the 25-mile trip back before they withdrew, acting as a rear guard. There were 73 Jap Guards at the prison camp according to the American prisoners and about 150 Jap transient soldiers in the three trucks blown to pieces by the bazooka and counting the Cabu force which the Filipino guerrillas took care of, we figure some 500 Japs were killed in the whole action. American losses were two killed, three wounded, and among the Filipino guerrillas, two wounded. There were no prisoners killed. A total of 511 got to the hospital, 486 Americans and the others British, Dutch and Norwegian.

"One interesting way in which the Filipinos helped us was in removing their dogs from the vicinity and muzzling the few left behind. The Alamo Scouts noticed when they went in on their reconnaissance mission that the dogs were apt to start barking and growling and they thought the Japs might get suspicious when the



whole group of Rangers approached so we asked the natives' help in removing this danger and they took care of at least 500 dogs in the territory around the camp."

The men were unanimous in their praise and high regard for General Douglas MacArthur, General Walter Krueger, the Commanding Officer of the Sixth Army, and their battalion commander, who accompanied them and led the mission, Lieut. Colonel Henry H. Mucci of Bridgeport, Connecticut. The group is a special unit of picked men for the purpose of carrying out difficult missions such as this.

The group of four men who will speak in the New York area are: Capt. Robert W. Prince, 25, who has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart, who commanded C Company of the Sixth Ranger Battalion. He graduated from Stanford University in 1941, entered service at once and went overseas in 1942, and is from Seattle, Washington; Sergeant Harold Hard, 26-year old member of the Alamo Scouts has been awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon and served at Finschhafen, New Guinea, Hollandia, and Windy Island in the Biak Group, before the Philippines Campaign; He graduated from Michigan State College and is from Coldwater, Michigan; Pfc. Leland A. Provencher, 27, of Lynchfield, Minnesota who has been awarded the Bronze Star, Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two battle stars, and three battle stars on his Pacific Theater Ribbon, served in Australia, New Guinea and the Philippines and Pfc. Carlton Dietzel, 24 of Pigeon, Michigan, who has been awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, three stars on his Pacific Theatre Ribbon and two on his Philippine Liberation Ribbon.

The four men going to Chicago, Illinois and surrounding area include: 1st Sgt. Robert G. Anderson, 25, of Trenton, Tennessee, who has been awarded the Bronze Star Medal; Staff Sgt. Charles W. Brown, 29, who wears the Bronze Star Medal saw action on Leyte, and Luzon and is from Chicago Heights, Illinois; Pfc. Charles S. Swain, 23, who was awarded the Bronze Star Medal and is from Beaver Dam, Wisconsin; and Pfc. Leroy Myerhoff, 26, of Evansville, Indiana, who wears the Bronze Star Medal, three battle stars in his Pacific Theatre Ribbon and two on his Philippine Liberation Ribbon.

The other four will go to the Los Angeles, California area and are: 1st Lieut. Melville H. Schmidt, 26, of New Orleans, Louisiana, who graduated from Tulane University, and led one of the assault platoons that broke into the prison; Staff Sgt. Theodore R. Richardson, who is 25 and from Dallas, Texas. He has been awarded the Bronze Star Medal and Combat Infantry Badge; Staff Sgt. William R. Butler, 29, of Cleveland, Oklahoma who was awarded a Bronze Star Medal and formerly worked at the West End Chemical Company in California; and Pfc. Gilbert Cox, 22, an Alamo Scout from Enterprise, Oregon, who has received the Silver Star, Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, and Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two battle stars